

DEPARTMENT OF STATE REVENUE

LETTER OF FINDINGS NUMBER: 05-0254

**Cigarette Tax
For Tax Year 2004**

NOTICE: Under IC 4-22-7-7, this document is required to be published in the Indiana Register and is effective on its date of publication. It shall remain in effect until the date it is superseded or deleted by the publication of a new document in the Indiana Register. The publication of this document will provide the general public with information about the Department's official position concerning a specific issue.

I. Cigarette Tax--Imposition

Authority: IC 6-8.1-5-1; 45 IAC 15-5-3(b); IC 6-7-1-1; 15 U.S.C. §§ 375-378

Taxpayer protests the imposition of cigarette tax.

II. Tax Administration—Negligence Penalty and Interest

Authority: IC 6-8.1-10-1; IC 6-8.1-10-2.1; 45 IAC 15-11-2

Taxpayer protests the imposition of a ten percent negligence penalty and interest.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

Taxpayer is an individual. As the result of an investigation, the Indiana Department of Revenue determined that taxpayer owed cigarette tax on cigarettes ordered via the internet/telephone and delivered in Indiana. Taxpayer protests that she does not owe these taxes. Further facts will be supplied as required.

I. Cigarette Tax--Imposition

DISCUSSION

Before examining the taxpayer's protest, it should be noted that the *taxpayer* bears the burden of proof. IC 6-8.1-5-1(b) states in pertinent part:

The notice of proposed assessment is prima facie evidence that the department's claim for the unpaid tax is valid. The burden of proving that the proposed assessment is wrong rests with the person against whom the proposed assessment is made.

The Indiana Administrative Code also states “[t]he burden of proving that a proposed assessment is incorrect rests with the taxpayer....” 45 IAC 15-5-3(b).

The taxpayer’s protest consisted of the following single sentence (the taxpayer neither attended, nor telephoned, for the scheduled hearing):

I would like to protest this tax. What law (I.C.) Indiana Code is being used to collect this tax?

The cigarette tax is found at IC 6-7-1-1, which states:

It is the intent and purpose of this chapter to levy a tax on all cigarettes sold, used, consumed, handled, or distributed within this state, and to collect the tax from the person who first sells, uses, consumes, handles, or distributes the cigarettes. It is further the intent and purpose of this chapter that whenever any cigarettes are given for advertising or any purpose whatsoever, they shall be taxed in the same manner as if they were sold, used, consumed, handled, or distributed in this state. Notwithstanding any other provisions contained in this chapter, the liability for the excise taxes imposed by this chapter shall be conclusively presumed to be on the retail purchaser or ultimate consumer, precollected for convenience and facility only. When such taxes are paid by any other person, such payment shall be considered as an advance payment and shall be added to the price of the cigarettes and recovered from the ultimate consumer or user. Distributors, wholesalers, or retailers may state the amount of the tax separately from the price of such cigarettes on all price display signs, sales or delivery slips, bills, and statements which advertise or indicate the price of such cigarettes.

(*Emphasis added*) As this statute makes clear, this tax applies to all purchases of cigarettes. It does not make a difference if the purchase is over the counter, via the internet/telephone, or in any other manner. Just as every person who purchases cigarettes in a store owes cigarette tax, so does the person who purchases cigarettes from an internet vendor.

The Department’s assessment is based on information received pursuant to the Jenkins Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 375-378, which is an enforcement mechanism for states to prevent evasion of state cigarette taxes.

The Department refers to IC 6-8.1-5-1(a), which states:

If the department reasonably believes that a person has not reported the proper amount of tax due, the department shall make a proposed assessment of the amount of the unpaid tax on the basis of the best information available to the department. The amount of the assessment is considered a tax payment not made by the due date and is subject to IC 6-8.1-10 concerning the imposition of penalties and interest. The department shall send the person a notice of the proposed assessment through the United States mail.

The Department received information from the vendor naming taxpayer as the purchaser of cigarettes. The Department proposed assessments based on the best information available to it, as provided by IC 6-8.1-5-1(a).

In conclusion, the Department received information under the Jenkins Act which named taxpayer as the purchaser of cigarettes in Indiana. The cigarette tax is imposed on all purchases of cigarettes in Indiana, including those purchases which are delivered into Indiana, as provided by IC 6-7-1-1. The burden of proving the assessment wrong rests with the taxpayer, as provided in IC 6-8.1-5-1(b). Taxpayer has not met this burden.

FINDING

Taxpayer's protest is denied.

II. Tax Administration—Negligence Penalty and Interest

DISCUSSION

The Department issued proposed assessments and the ten percent negligence penalty and interest for the tax years in question. Taxpayer (apparently) protests the imposition of penalty and interest. With regard to interest, the Department refers to IC 6-8.1-10-1, which states in relevant part:

(a) If a person fails to file a return for any of the listed taxes, fails to pay the full amount of tax shown on his return by the due date for the return or the payment, or incurs a deficiency upon a determination by the department, the person is subject to interest on the nonpayment.

...

(e) The department may not waive the interest imposed under this section.

Since taxpayer incurred a deficiency upon a determination by the Department, as explained in Issue I., the Department may not waive interest under IC 6-8.1-10-1.

With regard to the penalty, the Department refers to IC 6-8.1-10-2.1(a), which states in relevant part:

If a person:

...

(3) incurs, upon examination by the department, a deficiency that is due to negligence;

...

the person is subject to a penalty.

The Department refers to 45 IAC 15-11-2(b), which states:

Negligence, on behalf of a taxpayer is defined as the failure to use such reasonable care, caution, or diligence as would be expected of an ordinary reasonable taxpayer. Negligence would result from a taxpayer's carelessness, thoughtlessness, disregard or inattention to duties placed upon the taxpayer by the Indiana Code or department regulations. Ignorance of the listed tax laws, rules and/or regulations is treated as negligence. Further, failure to read and follow instructions provided by the department is treated as negligence. Negligence shall be determined on a case by case basis according to the facts and circumstances of each taxpayer.

45 IAC 15-11-2(c) provides in pertinent part:

The department shall waive the negligence penalty imposed under IC 6-8.1-10-1 if the taxpayer affirmatively establishes that the failure to file a return, pay the full amount of tax due, timely remit tax held in trust, or pay a deficiency was due to reasonable cause and not due to negligence. In order to establish reasonable cause, the taxpayer must demonstrate that it exercised ordinary business care and prudence in carrying out or failing to carry out a duty giving rise to the penalty imposed under this section.

In this case, taxpayer incurred a deficiency which the Department determined was due to negligence under 45 IAC 15-11-2(b), and so was subject to a penalty under IC 6-8.1-10-2.1(a). Taxpayer has not affirmatively established that her failure to pay the deficiency was due to reasonable cause and not due to negligence, as required by 45 IAC 15-11-2(c).

FINDING

Taxpayer's protest is denied.

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